

THE LONG NINE

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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Abraham Lincoln's Political Career Through 1860

The Long Nine

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

THE LONG NINE

No group with which Abraham Lincoln became affiliated in his younger days has gained more prominence than the "long nine." Its most notable achievement was the winning of the state capital of Illinois for the city of Springfield.

Sangamon County in 1836 elected seven representatives and two senators to the Legislature, the largest delegation from any county in the state. These nine men were not only bound together because of their local political interests, but each one of them was six feet tall or over, which gave them the name of the "long nine." The combined height of the group is said to have been fifty-five feet.

The seven successful candidates for the House of Representatives received the following number of votes: Abraham Lincoln, 1716; William F. Elkin, 1694; Ninian W. Edwards, 1659; John Dawson, 1641; Daniel Stone, 1483; Robert L. Wilson, 1353; Andrew McCormick, 1306. These men, with the two successful candidates to the Senate, Job Fletcher and Archer G. Herndon, comprised the famous "long nine."

On one occasion Lincoln had opportunity to mention from the floor of the legislature the group of which he was a member. Some reference had been made to the figure nine as associated with old women, and Lincoln seized upon this opportunity to turn loose some of his wit. He said:

"A few years since the delegation from this county was dubbed the 'long nine,' and, by way of further distinction I had been called the longest of the nine. Now, if any woman old or young, ever thought there was any peculiar charm in this distinguished specimen of number nine, I have, as yet, been so unfortunate as not to have discovered it." The reporter of the Sangamon Journal in the issue of January 15, 1839, commented that this speech was greeted with "loud applause." As a sequel to this story Miss Mary Todd was soon to discover the peculiar charm of this certain member of the long nine.

Lincoln's leadership in the efforts which resulted in this group bringing the state capital to Springfield, did more for him than any other achievement up to this time. The very day after the victory was gained for Springfield, the Supreme Court at Vandalia presented him with a certificate of admission to the bar of Illi-

nois. One month later than this he took up his residence in Springfield. While the story of his arrival in the city, which was to become the new state capital, has made it appear that he took up his abode there as a rather humble country lad, he was in fact the most honored of the representatives of Sangamon County, due to the ef-

The members of the "long nine" and their ages follow:

John Dawson—45
William F. Elkin—44
Job Fletcher—43
Archer G. Herndon—41
Daniel Stone—37
Andrew McCormick—35
Robert L. Wilson—31
Ninian W. Edwards—28
Abraham Lincoln—28

forts he had put forth in the legislature.

John Dawson

In the 1834 election when Lincoln was first chosen for the legislature, Dawson was the only candidate who received more votes than he. Politically and socially, Dawson and Lincoln, the senior and junior members of the "long nine," had much in common. Dawson was one of the group who joined Lincoln as one of the six managers of the famous "Cotillion Party." He served five terms in the legislature and was a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1847. He was born in Virginia.

William F. Elkin

Inasmuch as Elkin was born in Kentucky it is possible that he may have been related to Rev. David Elkin, the minister who preached the funeral of Nancy Hanks. He served three terms in the legislature and was later registrar of the land office at Springfield.

Job Fletcher

Not much is known about Fletcher with the exception that he served six years in the State Senate and one term in the House of Representatives. He was born in Virginia.

Archer G. Herndon

The association of Lincoln and Archer G. Herndon may have had something to do with the interest which Lincoln took in Herndon's son, William H. Herndon, who later became his law partner. Herndon was born in Virginia, but for many years lived not far from the Kentucky home of the Lincolns. Herndon served eight years in the State Senate and was receiver of the land office.

Daniel Stone

This is the same Dan Stone who joined Abraham Lincoln in the abolition protest and signed the remonstrance with him on March 3, 1837. Possibly the fact that he was born in Vermont may have had something to do with his attitude towards slavery. He served one term in the General Assembly, and was also a Circuit Judge.

Andrew McCormick

McCormick seems to be one of the other rather obscure members of the long nine. His three terms served in the legislature seem to be his full sum of public service. He was born in Tennessee.

Robert L. Wilson

It was Lincoln's association with Robert L. Wilson which undoubtedly was responsible for his later appointment of Wilson as paymaster, where he served at both Washington and St. Louis. He served but one term in the legislature, but was five terms Circuit Judge and eight years a Probate Judge. He was born in Pennsylvania.

Ninian W. Edwards

One member of the "big nine," Ninian W. Edwards, was later to become Abraham Lincoln's brother-in-law. He was born in Kentucky, and while in Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky, had married Mary Todd's sister, Elizabeth. He served in the Legislature sixteen years, was a member of the State Constitutional Convention of 1847, and in 1862 was appointed United States Commissary by Lincoln. Upon his coming to Illinois shortly after his graduation from Transylvania he was appointed Attorney General of Illinois.

Abraham Lincoln

Although Abraham Lincoln was but twenty-eight years old at the time the long nine was serving in the legislature, he became the recognized leader of the group.

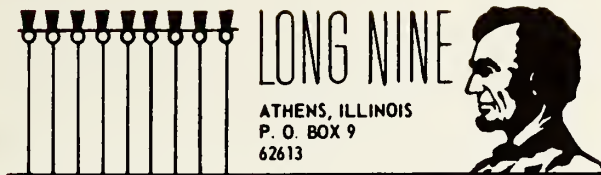
If the following tradition can be verified Lincoln was a member of another group for a very short time which would have towered above the "long nine." It is said that on one occasion the Ninety-third Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers was passing through Washington and in the ranks was a very tall young man by the name of Mahlon Shaaber.

Young Shaaber noticed a group of tall men standing together viewing the troops, the tallest of them beckoning him to come to them. The captain of Shaaber's company, recognizing the gentleman as President Lincoln, ordered Shaaber to join the group. Shaaber said that Mr. Lincoln asked him how tall he was and he told him that he was six feet six and one-half inches.

Mr. Lincoln is said to have jotted down these figures in a black memorandum book, remarking, after learning the height of the other men present and noting it in his book, "It will be a good while, I guess, before as small a party as this can show so great a total of inches."

The members of the party were Mahlon Shaaber, six feet six and one-half inches; Abraham Lincoln, six feet four inches; Hannibal Hamlin, six feet two and one-half inches; Governor Curtin, six feet two inches; and General Cameron, six feet one inch.

We are wondering if this group did not bring back to Abraham Lincoln the memory of the "long nine."



ABRAHAM LINCOLN - ATHENS, ILLINOIS - HISTORICAL SHRINE

THE STORY OF THE LONG NINE

Agitation had been abroad for some time to remove the capital from Vandalia to a more central location in the state in accordance with the trend of movement of the population northward. Among the contenders for the new site were Jacksonville, Peoria, Alton and Springfield, with Vandalia fighting to retain its position of control.

During the Tenth General Assembly of the State of Illinois which convened on December 5, 1836, Abraham Lincoln, a rising young lawyer, brilliantly led and directed the Sangamon County contingent, known as the "Long Nine," in its bid for the capital. "Boasting the largest delegation of any county in the state, the Long Nine came to Vandalia with predetermined purpose to remove the seat of government to Springfield." This group championing the cause of Springfield consisted of two senators, Job Fletcher and Archer G. Herndon, and seven representatives, John Dawson, Ninian W. Edwards, William F. Elkin, Andrew McCormick, Daniel Stone, Robert L. Wilson, and Abraham Lincoln, the recognized Whig floorleader in the House of Representatives. Their aggregate height was 54 feet, or an average of six feet, from which came the nomenclature, the "Long Nine."

To secure support for the removal bill which Lincoln had introduced in the House, the Long Nine reportedly resorted to log rolling tactics, and votes for internal improvements may have been exchanged for pledges to support Springfield as the future capital. Vandalia's and Alton's attempts to employ similar stratagems failed for "they lacked the power of the Long Nine, who, acting as a unit under Lincoln's leadership, could exert tremendous pressure."

During the term of the General Assembly, a serious threat by a land speculator in Petersburg to carve a new county out of the northern part of Sangamon County thereby reducing its representation in future legislatures was successfully met and repelled by the Long Nine. They feared dilatory action on the removal bill by its opponents and its possible defeat. Though a division bill was presented to the House in a revised form and was passed, it was killed in the Senate through the efforts of Archer G. Herndon, one of the Long Nine.

An attempt to embarrass and discredit Springfield as the potential capital by a resolution calling for an investigation of the State Bank at Springfield was countered by Lincoln. The examination was perfunctory rather than extensive, and the bank was exonerated.



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Final opposition came when by a narrow margin of one vote a motion was passed to table the relocation measure beyond the expectancy of the session. The Long Nine, however, rounded up absent members and succeeded in persuading five men to change their votes. As a result, the bill was brought back to the floor the following day and approved. On February 28, 1837, Springfield was chosen as the new capital of Illinois by the General Assembly of Illinois in accordance with "An act to locate the seat of government for the State of Illinois," approved at Vandalia, February 25, 1837. "Back in Springfield wild rejoicing culminated in a huge bonfire built around the whipping-post on the public square. Leading citizens quickly pledged the \$50,000 required as a condition of the removal of the capital. In the town that Lincoln had already planned to make his home, he was the man of the hour."

The victorious Long Nine staged a celebration at Ebenezer Capps' tavern to which the entire legislature was invited. A public dinner was held in Springfield on July 25 at Spottswood's Rural Hotel where "some sixty or seventy gentlemen" drank upwards of forty toasts recognizing the "judicious management ... ability ... gentlemanly deportment ... constant and untiring labor" of the Sangamon delegation. The future of Illinois and "Springfield's glory as the capital were viewed in the rosiest optimism." Lincoln toasted: "All our friends -- They are too numerous to be now named individually, while there is no one of them who is not too dear to be forgotten or neglected."

-- Marion D. Pratt --

A second public dinner was held to honor the "LONG NINE" at ATHENS, ILLINOIS, the second largest city in Sangamon County. The inhabitants in this section of Sangamon County were ably represented by ABRAHAM LINCOLN and ROBERT L. WILSON. The "LONG NINE BANQUET" was reported in the "SANGAMO JOURNAL" Newspaper, August 3, 1837, Springfield, Illinois.

ATHENS, ILLINOIS - August 3, 1837

The citizens of this place and vicinity, today gave a public dinner to the Delegation from this county, as a demonstration of Approbation of their course in the Legislature. We have to regret that it was not in the power of Mr. Fletcher or Col. Dawson to attend. Mr. J. D. Allen acted as Marshal of the day assisted by Messrs. Hurt and Grosh as Deputy Marshals. Wm. P. Brown, Esq. presided at the table as President. The Springfield Band kindly volunteered their services on the occasion. At one o'clock about one hundred and fifty gentlemen sat down to an excellent dinner prepared by Mr. Anderson. After the cloth was removed, the following toasts were disposed of.

REGULAR TOASTS

The United States, 'our Country and Whole Country'

The State of Illinois. Possessed of a fertile soil and solubrious climate surrounded by navigable rivers and lakes we look forward to the brilliant destiny that awaits her with a confidence undisturbed by the present disastrous conditions of our beloved country.

The County of Sangamon. One of the brightest stars in the galaxy which constitute our State. Let her be now and forever one and inseparable.

The recent session of our State Legislature. Its members have performed their duties promptly. Well done good and faithful servants.

The internal Improvement System - as we have embarked in it, let it be energetically prosecuted. Its results will be felt in the rapid accumulation of wealth and population, and their inseparable concomitants and advancement of education and the development of the great natural wealth of the State.

Illinois State Rights and Statesmen. - May all parties unite in advancing the former and sustaining the latter.

The United States Bank and State Bank of Illinois. Their 'rags' are good in Athens.

John T. Stuart - The voters of the 3d. Congressional district appreciate his talents and worth, and will by a triumphant majority next August elect him to represent them in the Congress of the United States.

VOLUNTEERS

By - J. K. Hurt : 'The Long Nine of Old Sangamon'. In the language of Gen. Ewing 'nine intellectual and physical giants' - By a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull together, they located the seat of government at Springfield.

By - S. B. Esty : Our political institution founded on the natural and immutable laws of man, they have the guarantee of a permanent existance in the patriotism and intelligence of a free people.

By - B. G. Elkin : A Capital gained and not a foot of territory lost.

By - W. B. Brown : The Long Nine of Sangamon Deservedly popular and influential as members of our Legislature, fearless, talented, and upright they nobly maintained the interests of their constituents, raised the character of our County and reflected honor upon the State. May they like Crocket go ahead.



By - John B. Taylor : Illinois a free State governed by a judicious legislation inhabited by an enlightened and free people. Their Motto is Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufacturers.

By - H. C. Rogers : Our delegation of the last General Assembly. Their valuable service merit of their constituents the highest praise. May they be remembered should they offer their services again to the citizens of Sangamon. Messers Herndon and Fletcher, the people's choice. They will glory in sustaining them while they continue to serve them faithfully.

By - J. D. Allen : Illinois - Her course is onward. She has reared the Standard of her rights and proudly assumes that pre-eminence to which her natural resources and the virtue and intelligence of her people so justly entitle her.

By - W. S. Stone : Principles not men - May the honest supporters of the former always prevail over the slavish advocates of the latter.

By - R. L. Wilson : The Citizens of Athens, hospitable, patriotic and intelligent. May it continue the second town in numerical strength in the Key Stone County.

By - E. D. Baker : The people's choice. They will glory in sustaining him while he serves them faithfully.

By - A. Lincoln : He has fulfilled the expectations of his friends and disappointed the hopes of his enemies.

By - J. G. Hunter : Maj. E. D. Baker - He received a dish thoroughly minced from Mr. Lincoln and baked it until it was thoroughly done! done! Thanks to Maj. Baker.

By - J. D. Allen : N. W. Edwards - a good scion of a noble stock.

By - A. G. Herndon : Much better than we expected Must go again.

By - A. Lincoln : One of nature's nobility.

By - Robert L. Wilson : A true representative of Sangamon County and an honest man.

By - Col. John Dawson : A true friend of democratic principles and a faithful servant of the people.

By - Hon. Dan Stone : The citizens of Sangamon will not forget their absent friend.

By - H. C. Rogers : Our system of internal Improvement and Education. Both eminently calculated to elevate the character, promote the happiness and wealth of the citizens of our State. We wish them the greatest possible success.

By - Col. Wm. F. Elkin : His merits silence his enemies.

By - A. Lincoln : Sangamon County will ever be true to her best interests and never more so than to reciprocating the good feelings of the citizens of Athens and neighborhood.

By - A. G. Herndon : Athens: May she continue to increase in population until she ranks with the first towns of the State.

The Springfield Bank - Our thanks are due them for their attendance on the present occasion. They merit the greatest praise and commendation.

By - Thomas C. Elkin : Education - the pillar which upholds the temple of liberty. Immortality to those who have reared it in Illinois.

Numerous other volunteers were presented, but copies of them were not obtained. The company separated in good time and no other occurred to mar the pleasure of the day.

LONG NINE, INC.
Box 9
Athens, Illinois



Abraham Lincoln Toasts The Citizens Of Athens, Illinois

Abraham Lincoln and other members of the famous "Long Nine" Legislators were banqueted in this building, August 3, 1837, for their most successful efforts in the Illinois General Assembly that moved the seat of Government from Vandalia to Springfield, Illinois



Men, women and children will be entertained and their time well accounted for in recalling these new unfolded episodes in the life of Abraham Lincoln as depicted by Nationally known artists. Lincoln Scholars will be enlightened.

Dioramas — by artist — Mr. Art Sieving:

Several dioramas will depict all of those documented events which placed Lincoln in Athens, Illinois. Tourists will be fascinated by the hand carved 12" scale wooden figures in the diorama 3-D scenes. All items: furniture — utensils — tools — buildings — animals are hand carved from wood. Mr. Sieving is the sculptor for the "Ninian Edwards Home Museum" — *The Life of Lincoln (in twenty-six dioramas)*, Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Sieving is also the Dioramist for the "Mark Twain — Tom Sawyer Museum" — in Hanibal, Missouri.

Paintings — by artist — Dr. Lloyd Ostendorf:

A nine by six foot original oil painting of the Long Nine Banquet Scene with Abraham Lincoln toasting the Long Nine members and the citizens of Athens as described by the *Sangamo Journal* August 1837 issue — Dr. Lloyd Ostendorf's works are prominent in the "Lincoln College Museum", Lincoln, Illinois. Dr. Ostendorf's paintings are featured on the covers of the Lincoln Herald Magazine.

Research — by historian — Dr. Wayne Temple:

Documentation of those events associating Abraham Lincoln with Athens, Illinois, will be displayed. Dr. Wayne Temple, with the Illinois State Archives, is the Editor and Chief of the *Lincoln Herald Magazine*. Dr. Temple gave the Lincoln Day Address from the Lincoln Memorial and Senate Wing of the Capitol, Washington, D.C., February 12, 1971.

Artifacts:

Displays of antique items found in the building during the restoration. Iron spittoons — the original candle chandelier — old tools — bottles — etc.

Gift Shop:

Souvenirs by the artists: Mr. Art Sieving, Dr. Lloyd Ostendorf and citizens of Athens, Illinois

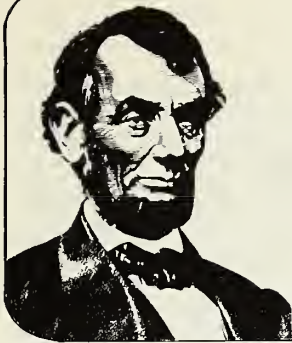
"Long Nine" Building — ATHENS, ILLINOIS — TENTATIVE OPENING DATE — May, 1973

Located on the "Old Lincoln Trail" — Route 29 — between Springfield and New Salem State Park — 12 miles Northwest of Springfield, Illinois — 7 miles East of New Salem State Park. Shortest Route to Route 66 and Interstate 55.

Opening Date - May, 1973

OPEN

1940



Lincoln Lore

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Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
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A "Great Fraud"? Politics in Thomas Ford's *History of Illinois*

Thirty years ago, historians thought Lincoln was most a statesman when he was least a man of party. In general, this meant that Lincoln the President was a statesman, but Lincoln the Whig politician was not. In the period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, some historians celebrated the practical, compromising politician as the ideal statesman, and for this brief period Lincoln was often pictured as a statesman *because* he was a skilful politician. This new view never redounded to the benefit of Lincoln's Whig years, though David Donald argued in 1959 that President Lincoln was merely a "Whig in the White House." The new appreciation for politicians did not extend to the Whig party, which was of little interest to liberal scholars who regarded its affection for banks and tariffs with disdain.

G.S. Boritt's *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* has at last rescued Lincoln's Whig years from the charge of narrow partisanship. But the reasons for the long reign of the view that Lincoln was a petty politician before the White House years have not been adequately explored.

One of the principal reasons is the heavy reliance historians have placed on Thomas Ford's *History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs, 1854). It is an appealing book — a minor classic, in fact — written with economy, full of facts and descriptions nowhere else available, and brutally frank.

It is Ford's frankness which has had the greatest appeal. The tone of most nineteenth-century memoirs was pious and earnest rather than cynical, and nineteenth-century state histories were generally celebratory in nature. Ford's book, a state history written almost as a memoir by an active participant in much of the era he describes, is remarkable for its candor about

politics. Himself a politician (Ford was the Governor of Illinois from 1842 to 1846), he viewed the motives of most politicians with cynicism and spoke with the authoritative tone of an insider. Historians anxious for a reliable source which pierced through the customary platitudes and moralisms of nineteenth-century historical writing have devoured Ford's book.

For the early period of Lincoln's involvement with Illinois politics, Thomas Ford's *History of Illinois* is one of the most important sources. It is quoted by everyone. Even Lincoln quoted from it. In the first of his famous debates with Stephen Douglas, at Ottawa on August 21, 1858, Lincoln argued that his opponent had not always bowed to the will of the Supreme Court as readily as he bowed to its will as expressed in the Dred Scott decision.

And I remind him of another piece of history on the question of respect for judicial decisions, and it is a piece of Illinois history, belonging to a time when the large party to which Judge Douglas belonged, were displeased with a decision of the Supreme Court of Illinois, because they had decided that a Governor could not remove a Secretary of State. You will find the whole story in Ford's *History of Illinois*, and I know that Judge Douglas will not deny that he was then in favor of over- slaughting that decision by the mode of adding five new Judges, so as to vote down the four old ones. Not only so, but it ended in *the Judge's sitting down on that very bench as one of the five new Judges to break down the four old ones.*

Again, when Lincoln met Douglas at Charleston on September 18th, a heckler asked Lincoln, who was defending Lyman Trumbull's reputation, what Ford's book said about him. Lincoln re-

HISTORY OF ILLINOIS,

FROM ITS

COMMENCEMENT AS A STATE IN 1818 TO 1847.

CONTAINING A

FULL ACCOUNT OF THE BLACK HAWK WAR, THE RISE, PROGRESS,
AND FALL OF MORMONISM, THE ALTON AND LOVEJOY RIOTS,
AND OTHER IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING EVENTS.

BY THE LATE

GOV. THOMAS FORD.

CHICAGO :

PUBLISHED BY S. C. GRIGGS & CO.,

111 LAKE STREET.

NEW YORK: IVISON & PHINNEY.

1854.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Title page of Ford's *History of Illinois*.

plied: "My own recollection is, that Ford speaks of Trumbull in very disrespectful terms in several portions of his book, and that he talks a great deal worse of Judge Douglas."

Ford's *History of Illinois* has played an important role in documenting Lincoln's career. It is one of the principal sources for the charge that, as a member of Sangamon County's "Long Nine," Lincoln had traded support for local internal improvements for votes to move the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. The book barely mentions Lincoln, however, and its real importance has lain in providing a picture of the political landscape of Lincoln's early career.

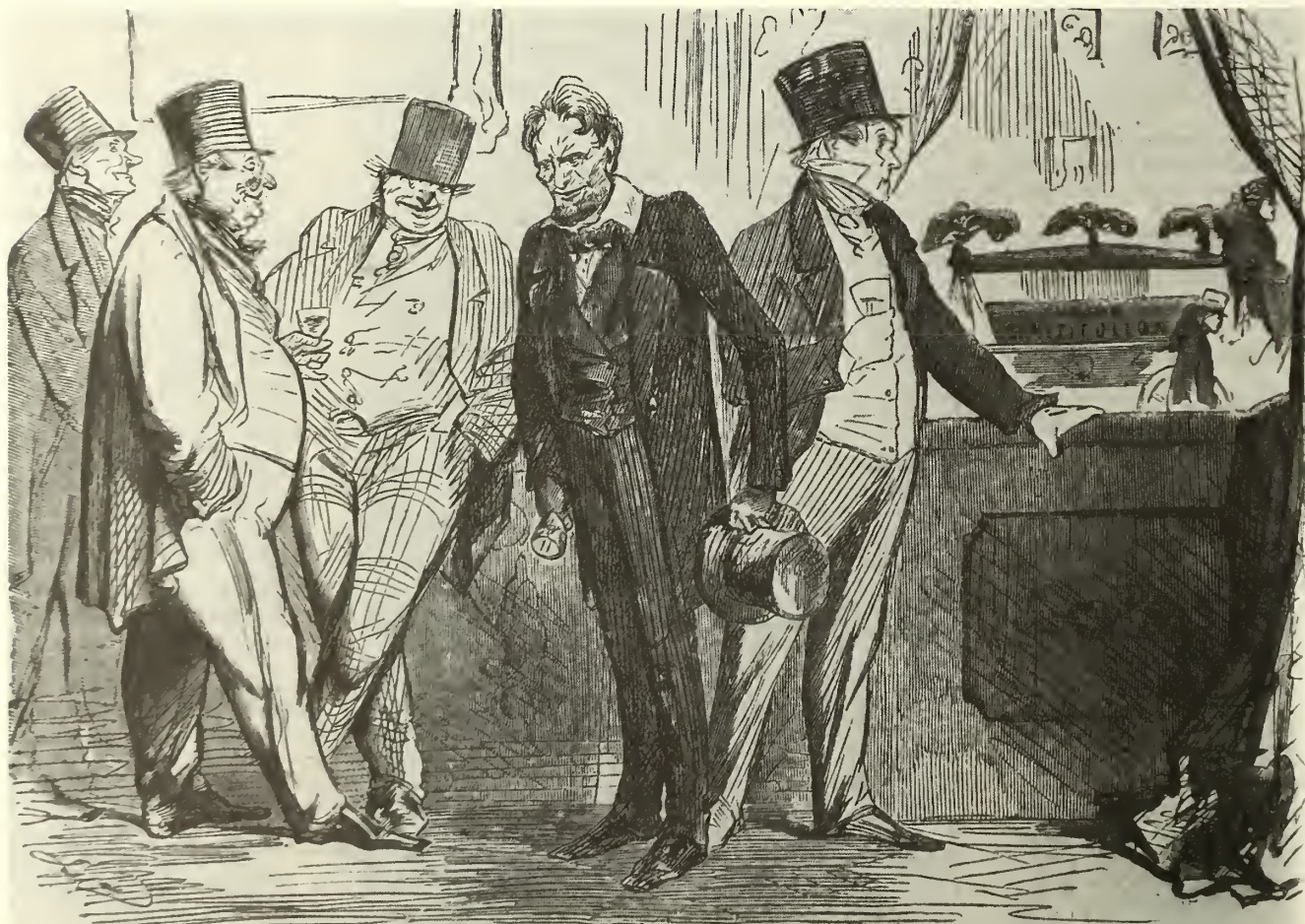
A good example of the book's use appears in the first volume of J.G. Randall's *Lincoln the President*:

The politicians' world in Illinois in the day of Lincoln's earlier career has been drawn from life in the vivid pages of Governor Thomas Ford. It was not an inspiring picture. Because of the want of true "issues" and the scramble for favor, as explained by Ford, an election became "one great fraud, in which honor, faith, and truth were . . . sacrificed, and politicians were debased below the . . . popular idea of that class of men." Government might mean one thing to the people; its purpose in the minds of politicians was another matter. They had a "destiny to accomplish, not for the people, but for themselves." With the people caring little for matters of government, said Ford, the "politicians took advantage of this lethargic state of indifference . . . to advance their own projects, to get offices and special favors from the legislature, which were all they busied their heads about." Politicians, he said, operated on the principle that "the people never blame any one for misleading them"; it

was merely a matter of supporting or opposing measures because of their popularity or unpopularity at the time. A "public man," said the governor, "will scarcely ever be forgiven for being right when the people are wrong." That was why "so many" politicians were "ready to prostitute their better judgments to catch the popular breeze." Whatever may have been the basis of parties in their early origin, Ford observed that "little big men, on both sides . . . feel the most thorough hatred for each other; their malice often supplying the place of principle and patriotism. They think they are devoted to a cause, when they only hate an opponent; and the more thoroughly they hate, the more . . . are they partisans." Party newspapers, he thought, promoted and perpetuated this unhealthy state of things.

Ford's candor about political motivation and his seeming nonpartisanship ("little big men" were "on both sides") persuaded many a student of Illinois history that politics were a sordid affair. Since Lincoln's life was thoroughly and inextricably enmeshed with Illinois politics, the result was that historians found in him, perhaps in less exaggerated form, the general attributes of Illinois politicians outlined by Thomas Ford.

The bitterness of Ford's disgust for politics and politicians was extraordinary and was not misrepresented by Randall and other Lincoln biographers who saw Lincoln's early political career as narrowly partisan and crafty. Ford introduces his theme in his discussion of the first Illinois legislature early in the book. "It appears," he said, "by the journals of this first legislature that a committee was appointed to contract for stationery, who reported that they had purchased a



OUR PRESIDENTIAL MERRYMAN.

The Presidential party was engaged in a lively exchange of wit and humor. The President Elect was the merriest among the merry, kept those around him in a continual roar."—*Daily Paper*.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. *Harper's Weekly* pictured Lincoln swapping stories with drinking politicians, as a hearse carrying the Union and the Constitution passed by.



FIGURE 3. Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper* pictured the crowd of office-seekers who besieged Lincoln when his administration began.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

sufficient stock at the cost of \$13[.]50. For every dollar then paid, we now pay hundreds for the same articles; but this was in the days of real frugality and economy, and before any of the members had learned the gentlemanly art of laying in, from the public stock, a year or two's supply at home." Surveying the state's political history up to 1830, and "calling to mind the prominent actors in the scenes of that day, the fierce struggles and quarrels amongst them, the loves and the hatreds, the hopes, fears, successes and disappointments of men, recently, but now no more on the stage of action, one cannot but be struck with the utter nothingness of mere contests for office." The old and corrupt methods of politics were carried into the new state. "In those days," Ford said, "the people drank vast quantities of whiskey and other liquors; and the dispensation of liquors, or 'treating,' as it was called, by candidates for office, was an indispensable element of success at elections." The personal politics, intrigue, and disregard of the public welfare practiced in gaining election "were carried . . . into the legislature. Almost everything there was done from personal motives." Ford's message was simple: "Hitherto in Illinois the race of politicians has been more numerous and more popular with the people, than the race of statesmen."

Though Ford's views are exceptional for their disdain for the methods of politics, they have the ring of authenticity because of their lack of partisan flavor. Denunciations of politics and politicians in the nineteenth century were common, but they came most often as denunciations of the practices and practitioners of the opposite party. Ford spared almost no one; Democrat and Whig alike fell before his critical scythe.

Though nonpartisan in his criticism of politicians, Ford was nevertheless far from objective. His *History of Illinois* is colored by a prejudice not against any particular party but against parties themselves — or rather, against politics with or without parties. An especially revealing but little-known article on Ford's *History* in "The Illinois Bookshelf" column in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* for March, 1945, explains the reasons for Ford's peculiarly jaundiced views of the ways of politicians. Despite being an elected official himself, Ford's political success was achieved with a minimum of political effort. In 1835 the state legislature elected him circuit judge. In 1837 he became judge of the Chicago municipal court. In 1839 the legislature elected him circuit judge again, and in 1841 he joined the Illinois Supreme Court. In 1842 the Democratic candidate for governor died, and Ford replaced him with only ten weeks remaining before the election. Despite little time for campaigning, he won election in this overwhelmingly Democratic state. Thus, Ford

served as Illinois's governor without much campaigning and without ever having seen the state legislature at work. What he saw when he gained office must have shocked him. Another factor was Ford's long, painful, and losing battle against tuberculosis. He wrote his *History* in order to gain money for his five children, made indigent by his inability to make a living during his illness. The *History* embodies the bitter observations of a dying man. Ford died in 1850, leaving his manuscript with James Shields, who finally found a publisher for it in 1854.

Despite Ford's shock and disdain for politics, when he wrote his *History*, he could think of no better system than the one he had experienced. In fact, one could legitimately read Ford's book as a sober defense of the two-party system and an attack on the sophistication of the electorate. Throughout his *History*, Ford insisted "that, as a general thing, the government will be a type of the people." Whenever he denounced politicians and politics, he qualified his criticism by laying the ultimate blame on the ignorance or indifference of the people who elected them.

Likewise, when he criticized the political system, he often noted that the alternatives to it were far inferior. Discussing the period in Illinois before the emergence of two-party politics, Ford said:

There are those who are apt to believe that this mode of conducting elections [by personal rather than party contests] is likely to result in the choice of the best materials for administering government. . . . The idea of electing men for their merit has an attractive charm in it to generous minds; but in our history it has been as full of delusion as it has been attractive. Nor has the organization of regular parties, and the introduction of the new principle in elections of "measures not men," fully answered the expectation of its friends. But if the introduction of such parties, supposed to be founded on a difference in principles, has done no other good, it has greatly softened and abated the personal rancor and asperity of political contests, though it has made such contests increasing and eternal. It is to be regretted, however, if there be evils attending the contests of party, that society cannot receive the full benefit from them by the total extinction of all mere personal considerations, personal quarrels, and personal crimination, not necessary to exhibit the genius and tendency of a party as to measures, and which are merely incidental to contests for office. The present doctrine of parties is measures, not men, which if truly carried out would lead to a discussion of measures only. But parties are not yet sufficiently organized for this; and, accordingly, we find at every election much personal bitterness and invective mingled with the supposed contests for

principle . . . Perhaps the time may come when all these personal contests will be confined to the bosom of one party, in selecting the best candidates to carry out its principles. Ford could thus complain that parties were inadequately organized and denounce a party-less system, the dream of many an elitist critic of American politics.

Ford had no illusions about the workings of party politics; yet he recognized parties as, at worst, a necessary evil. He had a realistic view of party discipline:

The organization of men into political parties under the control of leaders as a means of government, necessarily destroys individuality of character and freedom of opinion. Government implies restraint, compulsion of either the body or mind, or both. The latest improvement to effect this restraint and compulsion is to use moral means, intellectual means operating on the mind instead of the old mode of using force, such as standing armies, fire, sword and the gibbet, to control the mere bodies of men. It is therefore a very common thing for men of all parties to make very great sacrifices of opinion, so as to bring themselves into conformity with the bulk of their party. And yet there is nothing more common than for the race of newspaper statesmen to denounce all such of the opposite party as yield their own opinions to the opinions of the majority, as truckling and servile. They may possibly be right in this. But undoubtedly such submission is often necessary to the existence of majorities, entertaining the same opinion. A little further experience may develop the fact, that when this means of securing majorities shall fail, the government will fall into anarchy.

Unlike many critics of politics and parties, Ford had no fear of majority will. His basic complaint was that majorities were poorly formed and represented, and that bipartisan measures frustrated any responsibility of politician or party to people. His criticism of the Internal Improvements Act of 1837, often pointed to as a glaring example of Lincoln's narrow Whig partisanship, was that it was advocated and passed as a bipartisan measure for the good of the whole state. "The vote in the legislature was not a party vote," said Ford, and

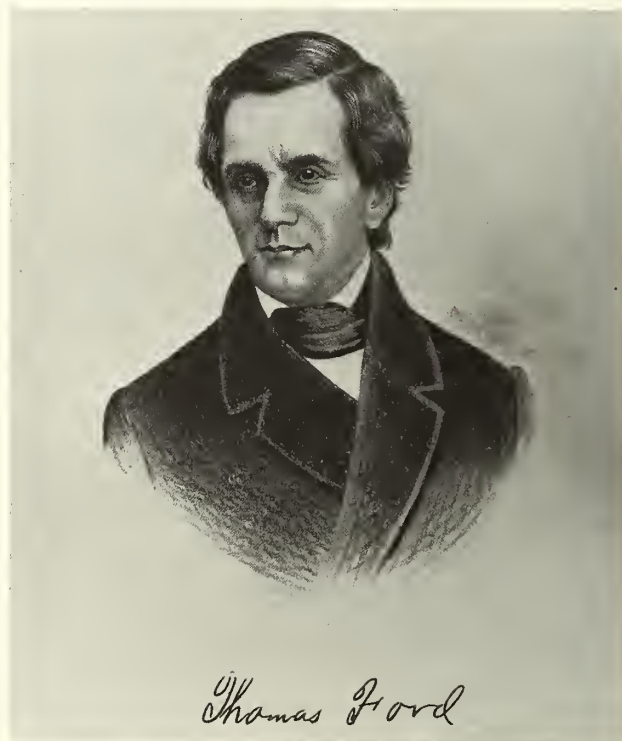
the banks were advocated and supported upon grounds of public utility and expediency; and like on the vote upon the internal improvement system, which followed at the next session, both whigs and democrats were earnestly invited to lay party feelings aside, and all go, at least once, for the good of the country. Whenever I have heard this cry since, I have always suspected that some great mischief was to be done, for which no party desired to be responsible to the people. As majorities have the power, so it is their duty to carry on the government. The majority, as long as parties are necessary in a free government, ought never to divide, and a portion of it join temporarily with the minority. It should always have the wisdom and courage to adopt all the measures necessary for good government. As a general thing, if the minority is anything more than a faction, if it has any principles, and is true to them, it will rally an opposition to all that is done by the majority; and even if it is convinced that the measures of the majority are right, it is safest for the minority to compel the majority to take the undivided responsibility of government. By this means there will always be a party to expose the faults and blunders of our rulers; and the majority will be more careful what they do.

Here Ford advocated the ultimate in the partisan ideal, the benefits of opposition to one party's program even when it seems to be a very proper program. This plea for disciplined, but responsible majorities looked forward to the proposals to institute in America cabinet government on the British model, proposals which were widely put forward towards the end of the nineteenth century.

As a theoretical commentator on the nature of party politics, Ford was unusual in his thoroughgoing defense of disciplined party majorities. In other respects, of course, he was a typical Democrat of his era. He thought that "no farmer ought ever to borrow money to carry on his farm." He blamed the internal improvements mania on "the general desire of sudden and unwarrantable gain; a dissatisfaction with the slow but sure profits of industry and lawful commerce, produced a general phrenzy." His ideal political system looked back to the storybook democracy of the early New England town:

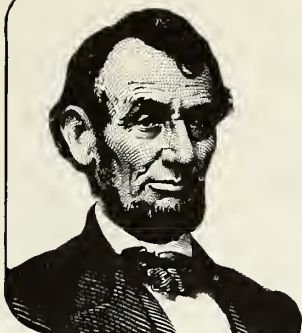
My own opinion of the convention system is, that it can never be perfect in Illinois, without the organization of little township democracies, such as are found in New York and New England; that in a State where the people are highly intelligent, and not indifferent to public affairs, it will enable the people themselves to govern, by giving full effect to the will of the majority; but among a people who are either ignorant of or indifferent to the affairs of their government, the convention system is a most admirable contrivance to enable active leaders to govern without much responsibility to the people.

Thomas Ford's very good book has been used to very bad effect. Historians have used its strictures on the unsavory motives and methods of politicians to criticize political parties; yet Ford was himself a staunch defender of party politics. The book has been mined by historians but generally misread by them. Showing almost a tenderfoot's pique at the methods of state legislators, Ford has been seen as an unimpassioned and objective observer of party politics. The book should be used carefully by students of Lincoln's early political career, but it should be used. It deserves a better fate than historians have thus far allowed it.



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FIGURE 4. Thomas Ford as pictured in the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Sangamon County, Illinois*.



Lincoln Lore

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The Political Life Of New Salem, Illinois

Lincoln's earliest political surroundings have always somewhat baffled scholars. The reasons for this are many and varied. Inadequate documentation and Whiggery's marginal existence as almost a subculture in Democratic Illinois are two factors. A third, perhaps more important, is the unpopularity of the Whig party among historians. Much of the best work on Lincoln was produced at a time when historians were prejudiced against the Whigs. Most writers liked Lincoln well enough, but they disliked the party to which he devoted the greater part of his political life (he was a Whig twice as long as he was a Republican).

Only recently have historians come to have a greater appreciation for the importance, one might almost say the vision, of the Whig party. G.S. Boritt comes immediately to mind for those who work in the Lincoln field, but there are others, such as Daniel Walker Howe, who have been giving the Whigs a fairer shake. This new work has gained attention and made historians think. It has not yet stemmed the tide, and more students should be reevaluating Lincoln's early political environment.

All in all, the effect of the modern unpopularity of Whiggery on the study of Lincoln's early career has been to keep the number of such studies small and to emphasize Lincoln's personal popularity. Nowhere has this emphasis been more pronounced than in the work on Lincoln in New Salem.

Studies of New Salem rarely focus on the political life of the town in which Lincoln forged his early career. Historians have generally shied away from characterizing the town as Whig or Democratic. Most say only that it was democratic (with a small "d") and that this openness accounts for

Lincoln's opportunity to have a political career despite his "defective" education, his inability to settle into a successful vocation, and his penniless and debt-ridden economic status. The beginnings of Lincoln's career in the Illinois legislature seem to represent a triumph of personal popularity and of the American political system. That it was also a triumph of one political party over another rarely gains mention, much less careful consideration.

Here inadequate documentation is *not* a problem. The opportunity to understand Lincoln's political career before the 1850s is probably greater than for any other of America's political giants. Illinois's voters showed their preference at the polls orally, and clerks carefully marked how each citizen voted. Therefore, we know in Lincoln's case precisely—by name—who voted for him and against him. Knowledge like this is unobtainable even for twentieth-century politicians or contemporary elections. We know for sure who voted for Lincoln, something we can never know in the cases of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, or even Ronald Reagan.

Who Voted for Lincoln?

The records do not exist for every precinct in every election, but a substantial number have survived. The poll books for the election of August 1, 1836, in New Salem precinct still exist. Lincoln was running for reelection to the Illinois House of Representatives. Sangamon County, of which New Salem was still a part, was to choose seven Representatives, and each voter could vote for as many as seven House candidates. Voters also chose a Congressman, a state senator, and

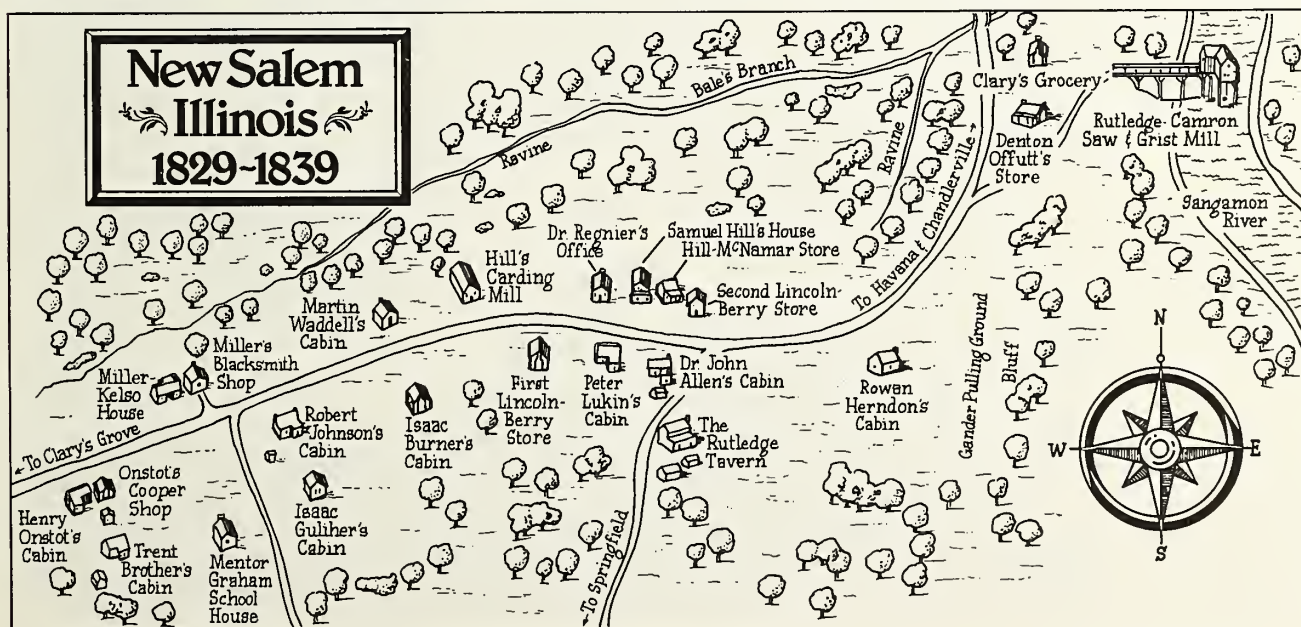


FIGURE 1. Map of Lincoln's home town from 1831 to 1837.

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first frontier. They were rough, fun-loving, and boisterous men of rather unsteady habits. Lincoln, the artisans, doctors, and businessmen of New Salem were men of the more settled second frontier. Lincoln's ability to capture the friendship of the Clary's Grove boys has always gained considerable attention from his biographers. First, it really was important. As members of his company in the Black Hawk War in 1832, the Clary's Grove boys had a hand in Lincoln's first political success: his election as captain of the unit. Second, the way he gained their respect—the famous wrestling match with Jack Armstrong—is the anecdotal stuff of which readable biographies are made. Unlike some important events, this one offers the bonus of making a good story.

Finally, Lincoln's friendship with the Clary's Grove boys has been the focus of much attention because of the peculiar importance of the American West to historians in the period when much of the great writing on Lincoln occurred. In the 1890s, Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" identified American democracy and individualism with the West. The frontier was supposed to be the cutting edge of the experience that made America, America and not a pale imitation of the European culture from which most Americans stemmed. For Lincoln to capture the hearts and minds of the Clary's Grove boys was vital to the process by which he maintained his status as the ideal American statesman to most historians. This showed that, despite Lincoln's choice of the law as a vocation and his political and personal friendships with bankers and businessmen, he was linked to the vital experience that forged American democracy.

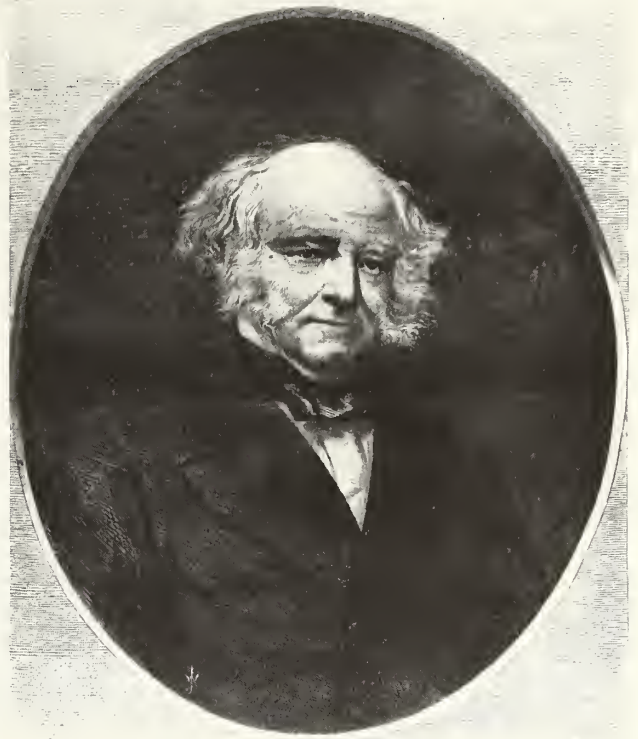
Scholarship has moved on since those times, and the frontier experience has greatly diminished in importance in the works of American history. The residue of this once important story remains in Lincoln biographies. Oscar and Lilian Handlin's recent *Abraham Lincoln and the Union* notes that Lincoln was "Equally at ease with the boys in the Clary's Grove gang and with the Reverend Cameron." A more important book, Stephen B. Oates's fine *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, carries the idea a bit farther. Describing Lincoln's campaign for the legislature in 1836, Oates says, "On the campaign trail, Jack Armstrong and the Clary Grove boys sang Lincoln's praises and helped keep order at his political rallies." Oates merely states explicitly what is implied in most of the Lincoln literature that preceded his book.

Jack Armstrong may have campaigned in 1836, but he did not vote, either in the state election in August or in the national election in November. And the Clarys were certainly Democrats. John, Spencer, and Zack Clary voted in the New Salem precinct in 1836. Spencer and Zack voted for William L. May and for the seven Democrats seeking seats in the Illinois House. John Clary split his ticket, voting for Stuart, Lincoln, and three other Whig aspirants to the legislature as well as for four Democrats running for the legislature. The Clarys voted in the poll outside New Salem. The other families associated with the Clarys have never been precisely identified, and the Clarys and Armstrongs may not have spoken for all the "boys." Nevertheless, this is not the stuff of which loyal campaign workers are made, and it seems almost certain that the Armstrongs and Clarys were no part of Lincoln's canvass for the Illinois House of Representatives in 1836. Politically, Lincoln was much more at home on the streets of New Salem than in Clary's Grove.

Whigs and Democrats in the Developing West

New Salem was solidly Whig. In the Presidential election the following November, the town's voters gave 65 votes to Hugh Lawson White and only 34 to Martin Van Buren (only one poll book for the precinct exists). Dr. Allen, Caleb Carman (at whose house, probably the Trents' former home, the poll was located), Robert Johnson, Jack Kelso, Lincoln, Joshua Miller, Dr. Regnier, and Martin Waddell voted for White. Alexander Ferguson and the Trents (who had apparently moved outside town) voted Democratic. Mentor Graham, who also resided outside New Salem, voted Whig.

Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield before the next election. In 1838 he again ran successfully for the Illinois legislature. New Salem had changed. Its citizens shared with most other residents of northwestern Sangamon County a



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FIGURE 3. New Yorker Martin Van Buren's lack of popularity in the West spurred Whig organization in 1836.

desire to form a new county with, of course, a new county seat. Lincoln and the rest of the Long Nine, busy with internal improvements bills and the drive to move the state capital to Springfield, were unresponsive. New Salem's residents registered their dismay at the polls in 1838. The Whigs lost ignominiously. Lincoln led the Whig candidates for the lower house of the legislature with a paltry 31 votes out of 122 (almost double the total of any other Whig candidate for the Illinois House but not even a third of what the Democratic candidates got). Even Lincoln's local popularity could not overcome the disappointment of New Salem's citizens. John Todd Stuart, who was immune from the county-division conflict in Washington, ran ahead of Lincoln with 39 votes but well behind his Democratic opponent, Stephen A. Douglas, who gained 81 votes. A few remained faithful to Lincoln (Waddell, Kelso, Carman, Miller, and Graham), but even they split their tickets, usually voting for Democrats for the other legislative seats. Feeling for division of the county all but obliterated party regularity.

Lincoln was gone from New Salem by then, and his popularity and that of the Whig party in the rest of Sangamon County swept him to victory anyway. It is the experience before 1838 that is important, and it really is important. This is not a quaint exercise meant to add some of the bright color of partisanship to your next tour of New Salem State Park, though lack of attention to party politics is a notable failing of historical reconstructions, which usually ignore partisanship for the sake of a bland patriotism. This is a step in the reconstruction of Lincoln's early political environment.

That environment is looking more Whiggish every day. We know that Lincoln's father was a Whig and that his cousin was a Whig. We now know that the village in which he chose to make his independent way in the world was Whig. There is no anomaly in Lincoln's affiliation with the Whig party. The tendency to associate the frontier with democracy and democracy with the Democratic party is a hangover from the days when the West was thought to be the key to the American experience. Lincoln was a son of America's frontier, all right, but the West was politically and socially complex. When Lincoln moved to New Salem, he left his Whig home for a Whig town.



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